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TWO POETS.

I.

W. B. YEATS.¹

AN American edition of this poem is heartily welcomed, for we cannot doubt the value and grace of Mr. Yeats's work—its weird, other-worldly charm, its delicacy of technique, its elusive harmonies, its verbal fragrances, as from the flowers that Persephone took with her to the purple hall of Hades. Let us then begin not by thanks to Mr. Yeats but to his American sponsors. Since Mr. Phillips's "Marpessa," no such noble piece of blank verse has come under my eye, and sung itself in wistful undertones through the ear into my very soul. Therefore, I cannot fail to bear grateful testimony. An exquisite prelude asks of the shadows that haunt great woods:

Is Eden far away, or do you hide
From human thought, as hares and mice and coney
That run before the reaping hook and lie
In the last ridge of the barley? Do our woods
And winds and ponds cover more quiet woods,
More shining winds, more star-glimmering ponds?

After this pouring out of wine "for the high, invisible ones"—this libation "before the harps begin"—comes the idyl. What is its story?

Forgael is an idealistic youth:

When I hold
A woman in my arms, she sinks away
As though the waters had flowed up between;
And yet, there is a love that the gods give,
When Ængus and his Edaine wake from sleep
And gaze on one another through our eyes,
And turn brief longing and deceiving hope
And bodily tenderness—to the soft fire
That shall burn time when times have ebbed away.

For him it is easy to conquer and slay. But he desires this

¹"The Shadowy Waters." By W. B. Yeats. Dodd, Mead & Company. New York, 1901.

love. He has been bidden to seek "his heart's desire;" and in the last island on his northwesterly journey, the "fool of the wood" that "has made all . . . wisdom" gave him a magical harp that made even brutish souls dream dreams and see visions, and told him that this love was for him, but beyond the shadowy waters, in woods that wither not,

Of chrysoberyl and beryl and chrysolite
And chrysoprase and ruby and sardonix,

which woods, however, stand "where the world dwindles out."

The sailors are weary and rebellious. They would kill Forgael if they durst. The harp only and a loyal, if skeptic, friend, Aibric, preserve him whom "dreams" have made "wise" beyond other men, such as find "content" if not

delight in the resounding oars,
In day outliving battle, on the breast
Of some mild woman, or in children's ways.

A galley is overtaken and brutally plundered. One captive, Dectora, a queen, is brought to Forgael in the hope that she may prove "his heart's desire." The souls of the slain have taken wing as gray birds toward the mysterious country beyond the empty seas. The queen offers large rewards to the sailors if they will slay Forgael and take her to her own country. They would have done her bidding but for the harp. A spell from the strings sets her a dreaming. All her past, up to the day of her first girlish intimations of love, is forgotten when she awakes. She, too, has been in quest of a love immortal. Then follows the recognition:

I know you now! . . .
I have been waiting you—
. . . our peace awakes
In one another's arms.

To which Forgael replies:

Ængus has seen
His well-beloved through a mortal's eyes;
And she, no longer blown among the winds,
Is laughing through a mortal's eyes.

Their mutual election is proved by the identity of their ex-

periences. In each case a "red hound" had fled from "a silver arrow." The courage, the life-love, the heart to lead this animal life, had been killed by the starry beams of a translunar idealism. Nevertheless, the supreme battle is yet to be fought. Why should they not, having found each other, hurry "homeward"—

fall upon some land
And rule together under one canopy,

as earthly lovers in an earthly seat of authority?

Perhaps the gods are malignantly luring them to their ruin!
For what are they to the gods?

In the eyes of the gods
War-laden galleys, and armies on white roads,
And unforgotten names, and the cold stars
That have built all—are dust on a moth's wing.

The star net of the divine cruelty is about them. May they not break its meshes? Surely

Love was not made for darkness and the winds
That blow when heaven and earth are withering,
For love is kind and happy. O come with me!
Look on this body and this heavy hair;
A stream has told me they are beautiful.
The gods hate happiness, and weave their nets
Out of their hatred.

Nay, he is too strong. He will not yield.

The love of all under the light of the sun
Is but brief longing and deceiving hope,
And bodily tenderness.

Either with her, the eternal love—or alone, to the end of his predestined course.

But *she*? Will she leave him? No; she could not live without him in the "loveliest valleys and woods and meadows." "I should wander," she answers,

"Hither and thither, and say at the high noon,
'How many hours to daybreak?' because love
Has made my feet unsteady and blinded me."

Nay; courageously in answer to his temptations to leave him and live—

I will follow you;
Living or dying, . . . I will follow you.

Then it is she cuts the rope that lashes galley to galley; and
Forgael and Dectora drift off alone, through the mist, on the
track of the gray birds to the

Streams where the world ends,

which the "fool of the wintry wood" had told of, and in
pledge of whose reality the harp of idealistic poetry had been
given to the fortunate youth.

I crown you with this crown,
she says,

For we will gaze upon this world no longer.

Morbid, says some one? True. Love should not desire
self-perpetuation. It should be content to serve. Life and
the perfection of living types ask of love to fulfill an impor-
tant function. Let no one hope to keep eternally that first-
love ecstasy. Let him perceive the flower to be but promise
of fruit, and fruit but a hope of a better variety, and that in
turn of a lovelier species. The flower should bloom and con-
sent to forget itself.

Yet, who that loves, or has loved, or hopes to love,
will not understand Mr. Yeats? Who can help, in his emo-
tional egoism, from yearning for one divine moment's exploi-
tation by an ecstatic eternity? Love and Death? Was not
that Leopardi's theme? Will all our scientific resignation
prevent us from daydreaming at sunset with Forgael?

Mr. Yeats has given us a beautiful and noble poem. Its
versification, its choice of language, its figures—everything
conspires to produce the intended effect. Surely it is the
creation of a great artist.

That he reminds us of Loti's "*Pêcheurs d'Islande*" is not
discreditable to either. It only means that both Yeats and Loti
have realized the Celtic soul; have entered into its mood;
have made us bustling, noisy Saxon folk pause a minute, and
hearken back to the murmurings we heard in childhood, as
we held to our ear the nacreous shell of some long since
perished myth.

WILLIAM NORMAN GUTHRIE.

II.

WILLIAM VAUGHN MOODY.²

TRUE poetic genius is so rare a thing that any distinct manifestation of it is the just occasion of national rejoicing. Recently we have seen all Germany exultant over the appearance of Hauptmann's "Sunken Bell," and all England acclaiming the dramas of Stephen Phillips. Now it is America's turn to rejoice, for "The Masque of Judgment" is truly a great poem, great alike in conception and execution.

The besetting sin of the poetry of America has been its timidity and its commonplace character. Rarely has it grappled with the serious problems of human fate. It has produced in Poe one exquisite flower of the night, and in Lowell a man who might have been a distinguished poet if he could have forgotten to preach. But, on the whole, the output has been tame.

No such charge can be laid against "The Masque of Judgment." Its conception is bold to the verge of temerity; as bold as that of the "Prometheus Unbound," and as vast in its cosmic immensity; a strange combination of Christianity with the Ragnarok of our northern ancestors; ending in universal destruction by the Midgard serpent in the guise of the worm that never dies. If Milton and Shelley had not shown us how such mighty themes could be handled, we should have regarded the dramatic presentation of such a subject as impossible. Prof. Moody has shown that his study of his great prototypes has not been in vain.

Though the conception of the "Masque" is so bold and original, it is not irreverent. It is needless to say that Prof. Moody does not believe that at the last day God and the universe will be overwhelmed by the power of evil. But it is an awful presentation of what would happen if the old dogma of the eternal punishment of the vast majority of mankind were true. The idea is, that if God could forget his goodness, and destroy the beautiful world that he has made, with

²"The Masque of Judgment." By William Vaughn Moody. Small, Maynard & Company. Boston.

all the souls that he has himself created, he would by his own cruelty unchain the power of evil, and perish because no longer good; for evil is in its nature self-destructive. Unlike the old Ragnarok of the northern gods, the new has a profound moral significance. The "Masque" is not, like the "Prometheus Unbound," a defiance of the Almighty. It is a reverent, but tremendous, protest against the doctrine of eternal punishment; and, as a work of constructive imagination, it ranks with the great masterpieces.

And the workmanship is worthy of the grandeur of the prodigious scheme. Prof. Moody's verse has the "large utterance" of great poetry and those rhythms that haunt the chambers of the memory like music. It is full of phrases like this:

Defenseless amid God's infinitudes,
Bruised by the unshod trample of his hours.

Through all the void
Clambered and curled creation like a vine,
Hanging the dark with clusters of young bloom.
He put forth suddenly this vine of Time,
And hung the hollow dark with passionate change.
The strife of ripening suns and withering moons,
Marching of ice floes, and the nameless wars
Of monster races laboring to be man.

But to the lion and the eagle most
Is given to gaze in the eternal eyes,
Like hounds about a hunter's knee, that watch
Each passion written on their master's brow,
And having read his trouble, steal away
To taste the troubler's flesh beneath their fangs.

And the great deep
Toiled like a runner's heart who runs with death.

Such flashes of poetry are to be found on every page, and from cover to cover there is nothing trivial or commonplace. I cannot resist quoting a few more passages.

Raphael, the angel who has come to love mankind, perhaps overmuch, exclaims:

Oft as I leave these sliding shafts of dark
And homeward climb the immaterial cliffs,
My heart makes question which were worthier state

For a free soul to choose—angelic calm,
 Angelic vision, ebbless, increscent;
 Or earth-life, with its reachings and recoils,
 Its lewd, harsh blood, so swift to change and flower
 At the least touch of love, its shell of sense
 So subtly made to minister them delight,
 So frail, so piteously contrived for pain.

Note this description of the mænads:

Shepherd.

Lean o'er this rock and look into the gorge.
 See how their torches dip from ledge to ledge!
 They race beside some shape the torrent bears:
 The eddies seize it now, and, leaning out
 Over the pool, they stop to howl their hymns;
 And, now it plunges, how they madden down
 With laughter keen, above the drumming foam!

Raphael.

Is't not a man's torn trunk?

Shepherd Boy.

See those behind
 Grasping the antlers of the lunging stag,
 That bellows when their torches bite his flanks!
 I know the witch who rides him!

Raphael.

Come away!

That is a bleeding head she holds aloft
 Above the clutching of her comrades' hands.

Shepherd Boy.

No more thou'lt shun their orgies in the wood,
 Throat of the hermit thrush and ringdove eyes!
 Throat of the mourning thrush, thy songs are done;
 Sad ringdove eyes, the lids have shut you in!

Shepherd.

That is his harp the dancers bear before,
 Mocking his solemn songs of other gods
 And other lives than theirs.

And this vision of the Crucifixion:

Lo! where God's body hangs upon the cross,
 Drooping from out yon skyey Golgotha,
 Above the wills and passions of the world!
 O doomed, rejected world: awake, awake!
 See where he droopeth, white and pitiful!

Behold, his drooping brow is pitiful!
 Cry unto him for pity. Climb, O haste;
 Climb swiftly up yon skyey Golgotha
 To where his feet are wounded! Even now
 He must have pity on his childish ones;
 He knoweth, he remembereth they are dust!

Earth slumbers, and the fresh'ning winds begin
 To blow from out the unuprisen east;
 Yet still abides that awful eidolon
 Large on the face of heaven, and its light
 Is as the patience of a thousand moons
 Upon the peaks and gorges of the vale.
 Now on that giant forehead slowly dawns
 Again the star, the bright, the morning star;
 Amid the changeful lampings of his orb
 The angel stands, with keen, outspread wings
 And lifted hand and intense vision glad,
 As when he led his brother orbs in song.
 But yet no word nor any breath of song
 Begins upon the region silences:
 All's hushed, as ere the first-created throat
 Was vocal.

There are many passages equally worthy of quotation; but I will give only the last page. God, at the Last Judgment, has hurled mankind down into the lair of the worm that never dies, who, thus aroused, has scaled the battlements of heaven:

First Lamp (to Uriel).

Brother, what lies beyond this trouble? Death?

Uriel.

All live in him, with him shall all things die.

Second Lamp.

And the snake reign, coiled on the holy hill?

Uriel.

Sorrow dies with the heart it feeds upon.

Raphael.

Look, where the red volcano of the fight
 Hath burst, and down the violated hills
 Pours ruin and repulse, a thousand streams
 Choked with the pomp and furniture of heaven.
 In vain the lion ramps against the tide,
 In vain from slope to slope the giant wraths
 Rally but to be broken. Dwindling dim

Across the blackened pampas of the wind
 The routed horses flee with hoof and wing
 Till their trine light is one, and now is quenched.

Uriel.

The spirits fugitive from heaven's brink
 Put off their substance of ethereal fire
 And mourn phantasmal on the phantom alps.

Fourth Lamp.

Mourn, sisters! For our light is fading, too.
 Thou of the topaz heart, thou of the jade,
 And thou, sweet, trembling opal—ye are grown
 Gray things, and aged as God's sorrowing eyes.

First Lamp.

My wick burns blue and dim.

Second Lamp.

My oil is spent.

Raphael.

The moon smolders, and naked from their seats
 The stars arise with lifted hands, and wait.

Such poetry will never be popular. It does not appeal to the maidens who wept over "Lucile," nor to the throng that delights in the "Barrack-Room Ballads." But it is great poetry none the less, and will survive, with the "Prometheus Unbound," when Owen Meredith and Kipling are forgotten. Let us hope that it marks the dawn of a new era in American literature, and that Prof. Moody may live to follow it up with other works of equal, or even greater, power. In the meantime we must thank him for demonstrating that American poetry can grapple with the greatest problems, and handle them with masterly vigor.

G. B. ROSE.